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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the basic properties of subject and object in Arabic and characterizes them through their grammatical manifestation in a relational network. The study also investigates the relational properties of subject and object with respect to other grammatical notions such as relativization, reflexivization, and passivization. Data for the investigation are drawn from Arabic syntax. Although Arabic is a verb-subject-object (VSO) language, it has a construction created by a rule called noun phrase (NP) fronting, by which NPs are advanced to sentence initial position. To refute the claim that VSO languages, including Arabic, may have an underlying subject-verb-object (SVO) word order, the study demonstrates that, in spite of the fact that Arabic allows for topicalization, fronted NPs do not establish that Arabic has an underlying SVO word order. It is shown that a fronted NP construction which creates an SVO order is a word order derived from the basic VSO. In VSO languages rules exist that are sensitive to a structural difference between subject and object. The basic issue, at least in Arabic, is independent of the linear ordering of the affected NP. (MSE)

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SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONS AND WORD ORDER IN STANDARD ARABIC

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Subject-Object Relations and Word Order in Standard Arabic

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The central goal of this paper is to characterize the basic properties of subject and object through their grammatical manifestation in a relational network. It will also investigate the relational properties of subject and object with respect to other grammatical notions like: relativization, reflexivization, and passivization.

As far as relational grammar is concerned, this topic is treated as the gist of any relationally oriented theory since it tackles the essential findings of relational grammar such as: raising, ascension, advancement, deletion, chaining constraints, relational hierarchy, chomage and tough movement, etc. It is also the subject of most argumentation, investigation, and debate by relationally-oriented writers such as: Keenan, Comrie, Postal, Perlmutter, and others.

My data is based on Arabic syntax, and it was triggered by the conclusions I arrived at through reading several articles on relational grammar by the above mentioned relationally-oriented writers. In the light of these facts, I selected data which best exemplifies the subject-object properties in a relational network.

Arabic is a VSO language; however, it has a construction created by a rule called "NP fronting." The NP fronting rule advances NP's to sentence initial position. According to this, I will account for those properties of subject which accrue to topicalized NP's.

Related to this, I will refute the claim that VSO languages may have an underlying SVO word order. Consequently, I will have to demonstrate that in spite of the fact that Arabic allows for topicalization, yet fronted NP's do not establish that Arabic has an underlying SVO word order. The point is that a fronted NP construction which creates an SVO order is merely a derived word order from the basic VSO.

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Definitions and Arguments

Keenan (1976) defines the subject of a sentence as either pre-verbal or post-verbal nominative NP. Whether the subject slot is pre-verbal or post-verbal is determined by the basic word order of the language as SVO, VSO, or SOV.

Topics are basically defined as pre-verbal nominative NP's. According to Li and Thompson (1976: 459-60), the majority of world languages have the topic-comment construction such as:

As for education, John prefers Bertrand Russell's ideas.
Topic Comment

And although not all languages have the subject-predicate construction such as:

John hit Mary
Subj. Predicate

there appear to be ways of identifying subjects in most topic-prominent (TP) languages. Li and Thompson's typological claim is simply that some languages can be more significantly described by taking the concept of topic to be basic, while others can be more insightfully described by taking the notion of subject as basic. This is due to the fact that many structural phenomena of a language can be explained on the basis of whether the basic structure of its sentence is analyzed as subject-predicate or topic-comment. Among world languages classified as subject-prominent ones are: Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Finno-Ugric, Semitic (including Arabic), Dyirbal (Australian), Indonesian, Malagasy.

Subject vs. Topic

1. According to Li and Thompson (1976: 460-66), one of the primary characteristics of topics is that they must be definite. A subject, on the other hand, need not be definite; e.g.

   A couple of people have arrived.

2. Selectional relations: An important property of the topic is that it need not have a selectional relation with any verb in a sentence. That is, it need not be an argument of a predicative

constituent. The subject, on the other hand, always has a selectional relation with some predicate in the sentence.

3. Verb determines "subject" but not "topic": It is possible to predict what the subject of any given verb will be. The topic, on the other hand, is not determined by the verb.

4. Verb agreement: The verb in many languages shows obligatory agreement with the subject of a sentence. Topic-predicate agreement is very rare.

5. A topic is confined to sentence-initial position. A subject, on the other hand, is not confined to sentence initial position. As the topic represents the discourse theme, it makes sense that the topic should be introduced first.

6. Grammatical processes: The subject but not the topic plays a prominent role in such processes as reflexivization, passivization, equi-NP deletion, verb serialization, and imperativization. The reason for that is particularly due to the fact that the topic is syntactically independent of the rest of the sentence.

7. Subject is normally determined by the verb, and is selectionally related to the verb; the subject often obligatorily controls verb agreement.

In conclusion, the topic is a discourse notion which is syntactically independent of the rest of the sentence, whereas the subject is to a greater extent a sentence internal notion. The former can be understood best in terms of the discourse and extra-sentential considerations, the latter in terms of its functions within the sentence structure (from Li and Thompson 1976: 460-66).

Properties of Subject and Object:

This portion of the study provides the necessary Arabic data to support the claim that the characterizing syntactic features of a subject are markedly different from those of an object. If that is the case, then the linear ordering which is the most important parameter to distinguish between subjects and objects

in some world languages, (e.g. English), is not a critical factor in the case of Arabic.

I Subject (Su)

1. It has an immediate post-verbal position in preferred basic word order, which is VSO, e.g.

V	Su	O
kasara	al-waladu	al-qalama
broke	the boy	the pen

But it may also take sentence initial position in derived word order, e.g.

Su	V	O
al-waladu	kasara	al-qalama
the boy	broke	the pen

(or)

Su	predicate
al-waladu	ḏakiyyun
the boy	clever

The boy is clever. (There is a copula deletion).

(or)

waladun	ḏakiyyun
a boy	clever

-un = is the nominative case marker for indefinite nouns.
e.g. waladun = boy
-u = is the nominative case marker for definite nouns.
e.g. al-waladu = the boy

2. Only coreferential subjects may be deleted under equi. e.g.

(ana)	akrahu	l-kaḏiba
I	I hate	lying

I hate lying

3. A pronominal copy of the topic NP may exist for emphatic use. This kind of construction is only possible with topicalized

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subjects, e.g.

al-waladu	huwa	sababu	l-muškila
the boy	(he)	cause	the problem

The boy is the cause of trouble.

Although this construction exemplifies a topicalized NP, yet the whole construction is derived from the basic VSO word order, e.g.

V	S	O
sabbaba	al-waladu	al-muškila
caused	the boy	the problem

4. It may control reflexivization, e.g.

jaraḥa	al-waladu	nafsahu
hurt	the boy	himself

The boy hurt himself.

5. Addressee of imperatives: imperatives are formed by using the verb stem; the assumed subject is always in the second person, e.g.

kul	attuffaḥata	
eat	the apple	(The assumed subject is "you")

6. According to Ross (1974), Su has primacy constraint; it has primacy over the object. This is true about Arabic since the subject and not the object conditions verb agreement. Verbs in Arabic are inflected according to any change which occurs in the subject, like changing the person, number, or gender, e.g.

Gender:	(a)	akal<u>a</u>	<u>al-waladu</u>	almawzata
		ate	the boy	the banana
	(b)	akal<u>at</u>	<u>al-bintu</u>	al-mawzata
		ate	the girl	the banana
1st Person:		ana	akal<u>tu</u>	(singular)
		I	ate	
		naḥnu	akal<u>na</u>	(plural)
		we	ate	

There is no dual in the first person; dual only occurs in the second and third persons.

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2nd person: (masculine)	anta you	akalta ate	(singular)
	antuma you (two)	akaltuma ate	(dual)
	antum you	akaltum ate	(plural)
2nd person: (feminine)	anti you	akalti ate	(singular)
	antuma you (two)	akaltuma ate	(dual)
	antunna you	akaltunna ate	(plural)
3rd person: (masculine)	huwa he	akala ate	(singular)
	humaa they (two)	akalaa ate	(dual)
	hum they	akaluu ate	(plural)
3rd person: (feminine)	hiya she	akalat ate	(singular)
	humaa they (two)	akalataa ate	(dual)
	hunna they	akalna ate	(plural)

7. Su can be raised to DO (direct object), e.g.

yuriidu muḥammadun an yugadira
want Muhammad to leave
Muhammad wants to leave

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(c) akalat al-banaatu kulluhunna attuffaḥaati
ate the girls all them the apples

becomes

(d) attuffaḥaatu akalatha al-banaatu kulluhunna
the apples ate them the girls all them

The girls ate all the apples

In sentence (d), kulluhunna="all of them" refers to the subject al-banaatu="the girls" or to the topic atuffaḥaatu="the apples," but in a construction like this the topic usually has the priority of controlling coreference.

2. Coreference with subordinate clauses: Coreference with clause boundaries is usually associated with the subject whether in a fronted or a nonfronted construction. Under no circumstances may this property be taken over by fronted NP's other than the subject, e.g.

(a) ḍaraba muḥammadun ᶜaliyyan ṯumma haraba
hit Muhammad Ali then (he) escaped

Muhammad hit ʿAli then he escaped

becomes

(b) muḥammadun ḍarabe ᶜaliyyan ṯumma haraba
Muhammad hit Ali then (he) escaped

With NP fronting in sentence (b), it is clear that coreference is controlled by the subject "Muhammad." On the other hand, a topic NP cannot control coreference (cf. Aljarim 1975 who suggested that the semantic interpretation confirms that "Muhammad" hit and he himself escaped.)

(c) ᶜaliyyun ḍarabahu muḥammadun ṯumma haraba
Ali him him Muhammad then (he) escaped

"He" is coreferential with the subject "Muhammad" and not with the fronted NP "Ali." Therefore, coreference across clause boundaries is controlled only by fronted subjects. In my opinion, there is a possibility that coreference could be controlled by both subject and topic in the given example.

3. NP subject fronting conditions verb agreement. A fronted NP may result in a change of the verbal form; such property is attributed to the subject, e.g.

becomes

ᶜaliyyun yuriidu muhammadan an yugadira
Ali want Muhammad to leave
Ali wants Muhammad to leave

What properties of subject accrue to topicalized NP's?

One of the major concerns of topicalization is to investigate the properties of subject which accrue to fronted NP's. Arabic is a VSO language in which case markings play a significant role in determining the grammatical relations of NP's. This enables us to capture the relations that NP's bear in the event of topicalization. What happens to NP's whose grammatical relations have been taken over by another NP (e.g. passive)? Is the subject demoted to chomeur status in an NP fronted construction? Does a topicalized NP condition verb agreement?, etc.

When NP fronting occurs in standard Arabic it usually affects sentence structure in terms of grammatical relations holding between the constituents. A fronted subject would maintain its subject properties, while a fronted object takes over some of the subject properties (like the nominative case marker), but it also acts like a topic and not like a subject. Consequently, fronted NP's do take over some of the subject properties. My conclusions are based on Noonan and Woock (1979).

1. It has the ability of controlling coreference across clause boundaries, e.g.

(a) ʃaribə al-awlaadu kulluhum ḥaliiban
drank the boys all them milk

becomes

	Su	V	O		
(b)	al-awlaadu	ʃaribuu	ḥaliiban	kulluhum	wanaamuu
	the boys	drank	milk	all them	and slept

All the boys drank milk and slept

In sentence (b) coreference is controlled by the fronted subject al-awlaadu="the boys," which is the subject of the sentence and there is no possibility that coreference is controlled by haliiban="milk" (acc.), because kulluhum="all of them" does not refer to the object but only to the subject.
Coreference may be controlled by topics, too, e.g.

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(a) naama al-awlaadu
slept the boys

becomes

al-awlaadu naamuu
the boys slept

In sentence (b), the verb naamuu="slept" is inflected for number. This change in the verbal form occurred so that the verb agrees with the fronted NP, but this inflection for number takes place only with plural NP fronting; otherwise the verb usually carries the same inflectional marker for singular and plural subjects, e.g.

(c) naama al-waladu (singular)
slept the boy

The boy slept

or

(d) naama al-awlaadu (plural)
slept the boys

The boys slept

In case of singular NP subject fronting, the verbal form would remain the same, e.g.

al-waladu naama
the boy slept

Therefore, the verbal form changes to agree with fronted plural NP's and not with fronted singular NP's provided that the fronted plural NP is a subject. A non-subject topic, however, does not condition verb agreement, e.g.

burtuqaalatan akaltu
an orange I ate

Here, the verb remains the same even when we pluralize the topic.

II Direct Object (DO)

Some verbs in Arabic take two objects. In this case, they can be referred to as the first object and the second object. These are equivalent to the English DO and IO. The properties of DO are the following:

1. It could be promoted to subject in passive sentences, e.g.

	V	Su	DO
(a)	akala	al-waladu	al-mawzata
	ate	the boy	the banana

becomes

V(passive) Su
(b) ?ukilat al-mawzatu (bi-waasiṭat .....)
was eaten the banana (by .....)

The banana was eaten (by .....)

The agent is usually deleted but is recoverable from the context. In many instances the agent is unspecified as there is no reference to it at all.

2. DO satisfies the principle of nuclear chaining constraint based on the relational hierarchy law. According to Johnson (1974), when a language "L" can advance NP's holding grammatical relation "A" = (IO) to "C" = (Su), then for any permissible candidate relation "B" = (DO) such that B<A, "L" can also advance NP's holding "B" = (DO) to "C" = (Su). This is true of (DO) in Arabic since (IO) can be raised to subject after its advancement to (DO) first; then it can be advanced to subject. The advancement of (DO) to subject is best shown in the passive transformation given in (II.1.b) above. Examples of raising (IO) to (DO) and then to (Su) will be given later when we discuss the (IO) properties.

3. It undergoes tough movement: DO————→Su, e.g.

(a) mina assahli an turḍiya muḥammadan
it is easy to please Muhammad (acc.)

(b) muḥammadun sahlun ?irḍaa?uhu
Muh'd (nom.) easy to please him

Muhammad is easy to please

III Indirect Object (IO)

1. A basic IO is realised as a preposition + NP, e.g.

V Su DO IO
?a^{C}ṭa arrajulu al-qalama li-?ibnihi
gave the man the pen to his son

The man gave the pen to his son

2. Can be relativised on with its replacement by a resumptive pronoun, e.g.

(a) ?a^{C}ṭa al-qalama li-?ibnihi alladi qaabaltuhu ?ams
(he)gave the pen to his son whom met I him yesterday

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Here, the resumptive pronoun exists whether the subject in the relative clause is nominal or pronominal. An example of nominal subject is:

(b) ʔaᶜṭa al-qalama li-ʔibnihi alladi qaabalahu arrajulu ʔams
(he)gave the pen to his son whom met him the man yesterday

3. IO may be raised to DO and then to Su (in passive sentences), e.g.

(a) ʔaᶜṭa al-qalama li-ʔibnihi --------→ (oblique object)
(he)gave the pen to his son

DO DO chomeur
(b) ʔaᶜṭa ʔibnahu al-qalama
(he)gave his son the pen

V(passive)
(c) ʔuᶜṭiya ʔibnuhu al-qalama ....(passive)
was given his son the pen

His son was given the pen

In sentence (a) the verb is ʔaᶜṭa="gave"; the direct object is al-qalama="the pen," and the IO is li-ʔibnihi="to his son." In sentence (b) the verb is the same ʔaᶜṭa="gave," but the DO is ʔibnahu="his son," and al-qalama="the pen" is a DO chomeur.

As far as the intermediate stage - illustrated in sentence (b) - is concerned, it is worth mentioning that generally an oblique object cannot be raised directly to Su in a passive transformation. As a rule, an oblique IO is never eligible to take subject position as a result of the passive transformation unless it is raised to DO first. In order to demonstrate that the intermediate stage is necessary to form passive, let us consider the same example as evidence.

ʔaᶜṭa al-qalama li-ʔibnihi
(he)gave the pen to his son

Unless we know the language well, it is likely to change this sentence into passive in the following manner:

ʔuᶜṭiya li-ʔibnihi al-qalama
was given to his son the pen

In this case, the assumed subject li-ʔibnihi 'to his son' does not have subject properties, as it does not carry the nominative case marker -u which is one of the basic properties of a subject. Therefore, the only way to guarantee that such confusion would not occur is to get rid of the oblique first by applying dative

movement, then applying an ordinary passive transformation. However, it is permissible to form passive directly from sentences with oblique objects without necessarily passing through the intermediate stage provided that we have a complete mastery of the language where we do not confuse the oblique object (introduced in a prepositional phrase) with its new subject form in the passive transformation; in other words, we realize that the new passive sentence has undergone a transitional stage which is not stated in writing but implied within the transformation.

Independent Sentences

Before proceeding, it will be useful to outline basic sentence types in Arabic (Nasr 1967). Independent sentences are of two types: nominal and verbal. Nominal sentences are those beginning with nouns, while verbal sentences are ones beginning with verbs.

Nominal Sentences

Those sentences consist of:

Nominal subject + Nominal predicate, e.g.

al-waladu tilmiiḏun
the boy student
The boy is a student

In such sentences subjects are known to take sentence initial position.

Verbal sentences:

Verbal sentences are of two types:

1. Verb + subject of verb (performer), e.g.

saafara arrajulu
traveled the man
The man traveled

2. Verb + subject (performed upon): passive, e.g.

V(passive) Su

qutila arrajulu (bi-waasiṭati + agent)
was killed the man (by .....)
The man was killed by .....

The agent is usually deleted but is recoverable.

As far as the theoretical issues pertaining to my argument are concerned, the entire portion from now on will be based on

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Anderson and Chung's model described in their article, "On Grammatical Relations and Clause Structure in Verb-initial Languages."

McCawley (1970) argued that English clauses have an underlying VSO word order, unlike the surface SVO. This position was criticised by Berman (1974) who tried to demonstrate that McCawley's argument is false as English does not have an underlying VSO at all, but it has a verb medial order. Berman took advantage of the whole issue to introduce another argument which seemed to refute McCawley's claim about the underlying word order of English.

Berman's major concern was to demonstrate how VSO languages maintain a basic VSO word order despite the SVO order manifested in certain constructions due to NP fronting. Berman (1974) argued that in verb initial structures both subject and object are dominated by the node "S." Consequently, it is claimed that other than their relative order to the verb, the two NP's have no structural differences. Therefore, if any of them is removed, there seems to be no way to identify whether the remaining NP in the reduced clause is a subject or object. Berman's argument indicates that certain rules apply to a clause that consists of a verb and a single NP differentially according to whether the given NP represents an original subject or object of a reduced clause, then the previous argument falls short. In other words, subjects and objects are structurally distinct even if the subject has been removed from a transitive sentence. The argument then focuses on whether topicalization in VSO languages can lead to the assumption that the underlying structure of VSO languages is SVO. The answer is that in spite of the fact that the process of topicalization in some VSO languages leads to some surface structure which is not VSO, yet the original structure of these languages is VSO. Let us consider this example from Arabic:

Su	V	O
al-bintu	?iʃtarat	θawban
the girl	bought	dress

which is originally:

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V	Su	O
ʔiʃtarat	al-bintu	ʕawban
bought	the girl	dress

The girl bought a dress

As genuine VSO languages, Breton (a Celtic language), Samoan (from the Polynesian family), and Arabic would present examples to indicate that their basic typology is VSO. One relevant point is that the linear ordering of the subject and object relative to one another is not the only parameter that distinguishes subject from object in VSO languages. Both Arabic and Samoan demonstrate that rules would not be stated to affect the NP following the verb, but rather the NP which has the structural properties of either a subject or an object. That is, it is not only their relative order to the verb that matters.

To take Arabic as a case in point, it has been stated earlier that only coreferential subjects may be deleted under equi, e.g.

ana	akrahu	l-kaḍiba
(I)	I hate	lying

while a passive construction cannot be equi-deleted, e.g.

yuriidu	ʿaliyyun	an yufḥaṣa	(bi-waasiṭati ...)
want	Ali	to be examined	(by .....)

Ali wants to be examined by the doctor

In other words, if one rule removes the subject, there is no reason to expect that another NP (the object) would carry the subject properties. As a matter of fact objects cannot be deleted by equi, e.g.

akrahu muḥammadun an yaḍribani
I hate Muhammad to hit me

The object -ni = "me" cannot be deleted under equi although it is coreferential with the subject "I." Therefore, only coreferential subjects may be deleted under equi. If that is the case then there are structural differences between the subject and object, and it seems unreasonable to claim that the linear order of subjects and objects relative to one another is the only parameter that distinguishes subject from object in a VSO language like Arabic. Similar arguments might be adduced from

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Breton. While Breton is undoubtedly considered to have a VSO order, this fact is not as clear from the surface structure as it is in the case of Polynesian languages (e.g. Samoan).

Arabic shares the notion of nominal sentences with Breton as it does not have the consistency of maintaining the inherent VSO order. A frequent word order in both Breton and Arabic involves the subject in initial position. Nominal sentences in Arabic are good examples of how subject takes sentence initial position, e.g.

Su	predicate
al-waladu	dakiyyun
the boy	clever

The boy is clever.

The word order shown in the previous example, however, is to be analysed as due to the operation of a rule of topicalization. In fact, the previous sentence has an underlying VSO order; the original order could be illustrated as follows:

V	Su	predicate
yakuunu	al-waladu	dakiyyan
be	the boy	clever

As a result of topicalization, we got the following form:

Su	V	predicate
al-waladu	yakuunu	dakiyyan
the boy	be	clever

The boy is clever.

Affected by copula deletion which exists in Arabic, the surface structure of the sentence took the form:

Su	predicate
al-waladu	dakiyyun
the boy	clever

In this first example the opposite order (of putting the predicate first and the subject second) is not possible. But in other constructions of subject and predicate, where the predicate is a prepositional phrase, the reverse order is possible, e.g.

predicate		Su
fi	l-baiti	rajulun
in	the house	a man

A man is in the house

Another type of topicalization is attributed to situations where topic NP's take sentence initial position, e.g.

(a) tuffaḥatan akaltu
an apple ate I
I ate an apple

-an in the topic NP tuffaḥatan="apple," is an accusative case marker. According to basic word order, VSO, this sentence is originally:

V S O
(b) akaltu tuffaḥatan
ate I an apple
I ate an apple

After fronting is applied, the resulting construction, sentence (a), resembles sentences affected by clefting, e.g.

ʔinnaha tuffaḥatun allati akaltu
it is an apple that ate I
It is an apple that I ate.

Under certain circumstances, however, word order is fixed more rigidly. In negative main clauses no other element precedes the verb, e.g.

la ʔuḥibbu an aquuda bisurᶜatin ᶜindama tuθliju
neg. like to drive fast when snow (verb)
I do not like to drive fast when it snows

Thus in this example word order, VSO, is fixed while in other instances some elements of the sentence which are in the topic can be placed before the verb. Consequently, if SVO word order is basic in Arabic, then it should have priority over VSO. In other words, the word order of the previous sentence should not be fixed so rigidly to the extent that it almost would not allow NP fronting rule to operate if the original word order is SVO. Obviously, the claim that VSO languages may have an underlying SVO order does not seem to have solid grounds.

Further investigation of the two languages (Breton and Arabic) enforces the argument that both languages have VSO order in spite of the fact that topicalization produces an output which looks similar to SVO.

In this respect I would like to focus on one significant distinction between Breton and Arabic. In spite of the fact that

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the two languages have a VSO underlying structure, yet there are explicit differences revealed in the surface structure. The point I want to make is that if the two NP's in a transitive clause - in Breton - are structurally equivalent except for order, there is no way to distinguish the result of topicalizing the subject from the result of topicalizing the object. In both cases, the output is a structure [NP V NP] if no pronoun copy, which is optional, is left behind. Thus some additional structure should be positioned from which the subject-object distinction can be established. This lack of structural distinction raised such claims about VSO languages.

As for Arabic, a different argument is raised. Other than order, the two NP's in a transitive clause are not structurally equivalent which makes it feasible to distinguish results of topicalizing the subject from results of topicalizing the object. One of the distinctive features of subjects and objects is the case inflectional markers. Subjects usually carry the nominative case markers -u, -un, while objects usually carry the accusative case markers -a or -an, e.g.

V	Su	O
akala	al-waladu	al-mawzata
ate	the boy	the banana

The boy ate the banana

-u is the nominative case marker for definite subjects.

-a is the accusative case marker for definite objects.

while in:

akala	waladun	mawzatan
ate	a boy	a banana

A boy ate a banana

-un is the nominative case marker for indefinite subjects.

-an is the accusative case marker for indefinite objects.

As genuine VSO languages, Breton and Arabic share the property of having embedded clauses which appear in the same form as main clauses except that topicalization is generally not applicable in them. To illustrate this point, let us consider this example from Arabic:

ʔaᶜrifu	annahu	sayarjiᶜu	baᶜda	ʔusbuuᶜayn
I know	that he will return	after	two weeks

If topicalization is not allowed in this construction, it follows that there does not seem to be clear evidence that those languages have a basic SVO order.

Berman's argument aims at coming up with conclusions concerning the need for structural differences between subject and object in languages such as Samoan, Tongan, and Breton where the basic order is VSO.

One of the arguments that has been raised is the possibility of taking VSO order of Breton to be derived. In other words, at some more abstract level the language might be assigned SVO or SOV basic order with a rule of a verb fronting to yield the observed VSO order.

In the case of Arabic the VSO claim loses its force and validity as the VSO order, in Arabic, arises before topicalization applies. Therefore, the point of positing an order other than VSO disappears, which confirms that Arabic has a basic VSO order while SVO is a derived one. In other words, the force of our argument hinges on the fact that in VSO languages rules exist which are sensitive to a structural difference between subjects and objects. The basic issue, at least in Arabic, is independent of the linear ordering of the affected NP.

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